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## THE RISE OF METROPOLITAN JOURNALISM,

1800-1840

THE mechanical evolution of the modern newspaper is due chiefly to the steam-engine and the telegraph, but the evolution of the modern journalistic spirit is due chiefly to an aggressive democracy. Probably in no other country in the world has the press been so intimately connected with the inmost springs of the life of all political parties. No other nation has produced such a reading democracy as ours.

Democracy demands publicity. This great leveling force, pulling down on one side while it builds up on the other, is naturally hostile to any concealments and evasions of purpose or action. It scoffs at pretensions to esoteric wisdom. It revolts against secret machinations, as perilous to that régime of common consent which democracy calls "Law." From such reasons sprang those occasional popular frenzies against some secret fraternities, frenzies which shattered the Masonic order in 1829-1830, and which have buried the American, or Know-Nothing party, under forty years of obloquy. Upon the triumph of the democratic principle, therefore, the newspaper has been peculiarly dependent. It is, in theory at least, the very temple and shrine of Publicity. In fact, the newspapers, scattered throughout the body politic, act as lungs through which our system of representative party government draws most easily its vital breath.

To the mass of people the controllers of influential journals are the real managers of the great world's stage. They set the scene. They put the words into the players' mouths. They call attention to the moral which adorns the tale. "There's nothing," says the rattle-pated city editor in a recent story, "there's nothing like original news to show the influence of journalism. One morning, after the cakes had been bad for a week, I said to my landlady that I believed the fault must be in the buckwheat. She said 'No, she didn't think so, for the flour looked very nice indeed.' That day I put a line in the 'Local Glimpses' columns saying that unfortunately the buckwheat this year was of inferior quality. The very next morning she apologized to me, said I was right, the buckwheat was bad, she had read so in *The Chronicle*."

The expansion of democracy in the United States has found a constant index and gauge in the evolution of the newspaper. As democratic sentiment among us took form and produced the organs of political party life, the journals changed from mere bill-boards to party-organs, and from party-organs to newspapers, obedient finally to the demands of Publicity rather than to those of Party. Prior to 1830 every paper was intended to be the preacher of some partisan gospel. It was filled with personal squibs or stump-speeches and published such stray items of general news as fell easily into its possession.

Glancing back for an instant at the beginnings of journalism in the eighteenth century, we see at once that the colonial press was in no wise a framer or leader of public opinion. Those papers were its humble and passive channels. Neither were they newspapers in our sense of the term. They were bulletin-boards on which were plastered the political arguments or purposes of factions and parties. Provincial New York had more clearly antagonistic political parties than any other colony. The two parties, popular and aristocratic, were somewhat evenly balanced in New York City and each had its chosen journalistic organ since the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Bradford's *Gazette* was founded in 1729 to be the mouth-piece of the royal governors and of the aristocratic party; Zenger's *Journal* was established in 1733 to be the similar representative of the popular opposition. As the most favored Tory organ, Bradford's *Gazette* was succeeded in the decade 1750 to 1760 by Hugh Gainé's *Mercury*, and in the era of the Revolution by James Rivington's *Gazette*. The office of this paper was sacked and its types destroyed by a mob of Sons of Liberty, who would not permit freedom of the press except to their own publication. This paper, called Holt's *Journal*, was the direct successor of Zenger's *Journal*, and the proprietor, John Holt, was a prominent patriot and Son of Liberty. All these papers were weekly; the first daily paper in New York City was the *Daily Advertiser*, founded in 1785, of which the poet Freneau was for a short time the editor in 1789-1790.<sup>1</sup> The proprietor of Holt's *Journal* was now dead, but under different names and through some vicissitudes of fortune this paper remained true to its original political affiliations with radical democracy.

At the beginning of this century the New York City instrument of the Jeffersonian democracy was the lineal descendant and representative of Holt's paper. It was then called the *American Citizen*. Its editor was an Englishman named James Cheetham, a

<sup>1</sup> The first daily newspaper in the country was the *American Daily Advertiser*, issued at Philadelphia in 1784, and now merged in the paper known as the *North American*.

master of invective, who was proud to be called an American Junius. When the breach between Burr and the Clintons occurred in 1801, Cheetham became the scribe of the latter faction. He assailed Burr not only through the columns of the *Citizen* but by a running fire of anonymous pamphlets, charging upon Burr the crime of treachery to Jefferson and to the party in the late presidential election. The friends of Burr defended him in the *Morning Chronicle*, which they established in 1802 under the supervision of an elder brother of Washington Irving. This journal canonized Burr and denounced the ambitious oligarchy of Livingstons and Clintons.

The organ of the outgoing Federalist administration was the *Commercial Advertiser*, still in existence, the dean of the metropolitan daily newspapers. This paper had been founded in 1793 by Noah Webster, and had at first borne a classic name, the *Daily Minerva*, suggestive of its famous founder's Yale education. Alexander Hamilton and the Federalists who followed his fortunes also possessed a newspaper battery. This was the *Evening Post*, founded in 1801, and edited by William Coleman, a Massachusetts gentleman and a lawyer. He had been a municipal office-holder, but De Witt Clinton's new broom swept him out of office in August 1801, and the *Post* was established in the following November. The New York *Evening Post* owes its existence to the first application of the "spoils" theory in our political system. Mr. Coleman and Dr. Irving of the *Chronicle* were both men of erudition and scholarly tastes, but Irving could compete with neither Coleman nor Cheetham in spiteful vigor of expression. These gentlemen filled the small space reserved from advertisements with malicious paragraphs about each other, or with furious diatribes against the leaders of opposing parties. A few local chronicles and a bare summary of foreign news six or eight weeks old occasionally appeared. Jefferson's first message in 1801 was printed in the *Post* on the twelfth of December, 1801. It was in no wise referred to until the seventeenth, when some contributor, presumably Alexander Hamilton, hid behind the dignified Roman mask of "Lucius Crassus," and discharged a resounding volley at the message.

Cheetham and Coleman were soon embroiled, and Coleman wrote of "the insolent vulgarity of that base wretch." Duane, of the Philadelphia *Aurora*, was another of Coleman's antagonists, and on one occasion the latter hit both his birds with one stone, thus :

" Lie on, Duane, lie on for pay,  
And Cheetham, lie thou too ;  
More against truth you cannot say  
Than truth can say 'gainst you."

The third corner of the triangular fight was well maintained, for although Dr. Irving was amiable, some of Burr's friends were equally ready with pen or pistol. The scurrilities of these faction-fights ripened into a harvest of duels. One day Matthew L. Davis, of Burr's Myrmidons, patrolled Wall Street, weapon in hand, expecting to slay Cheetham on sight. A challenge from Cheetham to Coleman led to a bloody fight between Coleman and Harbor-master Thompson in which the latter was shot to death.

None of these New York city papers wielded much influence outside of the city and its vicinity. The mentor of the Democratic Republican journals of the state was the *Albany Evening Register*. That paper had the advantage of location, for the state officers were residents at Albany and frequent contributors to the columns of the *Register*. It was the bulletin-board of the leading Clintonian politicians of the state. It was the paper which chiefly influenced members of the legislature while in session. Above all, its proprietors were sure of an income from the public printing. As for news, Albany or any other inland point was in those days almost as well situated as New York. There was no competition in the dissemination of the latest intelligence. Partisan information was desired, and in that department the *Register* could speak with authority.

When De Witt Clinton, covered with the reproach of his opposition to Madison in 1812, was cast out of the Republican synagogue, the *Register* fell with him into the outer darkness of "Clinton's big ditch." The new commanders of democracy, Martin Van Buren and others associated with Governor Tompkins, promptly established, January 26, 1813, a new paper called the *Argus*, to feed at the state printing crib, and to act as file-leader for all the orthodox Republican newspapers of the state. They selected as its editor a moderate and discreet man named Jesse Buel, who could be depended upon to obey orders. Any important proclamations were contributed directly by some member of the Regency, Marcy, Wright, Dix, or even by Van Buren himself. The country editors of the Bucktail faith scanned the *Argus* for the materials of leading articles in their weekly issues, and they accepted its opinions as inspired revelations. And they were. No man could become editor of the *Argus* unless he was acceptable to the Regency. "Without a paper thus edited at Albany," wrote Mr. Van Buren to Jesse Hoyt in 1823, "we may hang our harps on the willows. With it the party can survive a thousand convulsions." In that year the oracle was intrusted to the discretion of a young hierophant named Edwin Croswell. Mr. Croswell was

well adapted for the mysteries of political management. Although an unswerving partisan, he was cool and cautious in temperament. Sagacious judgment enhanced the value of his considerable executive abilities, and his contemporaries were surprised that a man, whose training had been purely practical, should infuse so much literary taste and skill into the acrimony and vulgarity of petty politics. Under the Croswell dynasty, which endured until 1855, the *Argus* touched the zenith of authority and influence. Mr. Edwin Croswell was admitted to the inmost circles of the Regency, and not even Mr. Van Buren himself was more cunning in the distribution of either commands or loaves and fishes. While Jackson and Van Buren sat on the throne, the *Argus* was one of a trio of party organs which represented the three chief centres of Democratic intrigue. Croswell in the *Argus* made known the will of the Albany Regency. Francis P. Blair in the *Washington Globe* spoke for the Kitchen Cabinet, and Father Thomas Ritchie, "old Momentous Crisis" Ritchie, displayed in the *Richmond Enquirer* the flag of the venerable Richmond Junta, the successors of Jefferson, Madison and Monroe. No triplet of party organs, before or since, exerted such unquestioned power. These papers, as Hudson says, "made cabinet officers and custom-house weighers, presidents and tide-waiters, editors and envoys. They regulated state legislatures and dictated state policies. They were the father confessors to the democracy of the country."

For the second or Whig Albany Regency Thurlow Weed's *Albany Evening Journal* was the accredited organ. The *Evening Journal* was never however the prompter of the Whig newspaper chorus as the *Argus* had been for their Democratic contemporaries. Neither did the machine of Seward and Weed ever obey the word of command so readily as Van Buren's. The Whig leaders directed a more intelligent, and consequently a less pliant party. The *Journal* enjoyed the advantage of the unique and powerful personality of its editor, Thurlow Weed, who was under no man's thumb and who wielded a far greater individual influence than Croswell of the *Argus* could ever claim.

Thurlow Weed and Edwin Croswell were together from 1830 to 1848 the foremost journalist-politicians in the state of New York. Side by side upon that Albany hill they patrolled the picket lines of their opposing hosts or sounded the reveille for the retainers of Seward or Van Buren. Weed's post was at once more honorable and more onerous. Croswell was at best only Van Buren's chief of staff, but no man could tell where Weed's power ended and Seward's began. Governor Seward's ornate eloquence and unerr-

ing phraseology fired the popular heart, but Weed held the workers in leash like a master of the hounds. He had become the master of a simple, direct, and powerful editorial style, but his influence depended little on his controversial paragraphs, pungent as they were. Personal acquaintance was his main reliance, and with habitual cleverness he made the columns of his newspaper contribute to these resources. There was a column in the *Evening Journal* in which Weed used to make personal mention of his friends and foes in short articles, varying from a line and a half to a dozen or fifteen lines in length. "That column," says Dyer, "was a prodigious power in the politics of the state of New York. There was seldom a young man in any part of the state, who gave promise of becoming a person of influence, that was not kindly and flatteringly mentioned in that column, no matter to what party he belonged." To the young and aspiring Whig politician, that kindly allusion in the most prominent newspaper of his party often seemed like a glowing promise that his humble merit should not lose its reward. The young Democrat also, who was revolving in the obscure orbit to which the Regency had appointed him, and who perhaps had believed both the *Evening Journal* and its editors to be of villainy all compact, was some day surprised and gratified to find that Weed had printed a flattering notice of him, in which regretful reference to his politics was mingled with admiring acknowledgment of his abilities. His opinion of the Whig leader and of the Whig paper changed rapidly. He mailed copies of the *Journal* to all his friends. Perhaps he called on Weed, and was received with winning cordiality. He concluded that his veteran foe was not so black as he was painted, and he returned home to wonder why the editor of the *Argus* was so much less clear-sighted than his rival of the *Journal*. All this strategy on Weed's part was surely not journalism, but it was excellent politics. By such means Weed obtained some power of manipulating the machinery of both parties, and his influence was the more valuable because it was so secret and intangible.

It was not and is not likely that journalist-politicians like Weed and Croswell could contribute much to the institutional development of the newspaper. They subordinated the journalist to the politician, as their predecessors had done before them, and the grinding of the party organ was sufficiently musical to their ears. But in the very heyday of their fame and vigor, a new spirit was beginning to move upon the waters especially in New York City.

The beginning of the second quarter of this century was a period of intellectual unrest and fermentation. In Europe there

was political revolution ; in this country there was Jackson's tumultuous democracy. Anti-Masonry, Abolitionism, and Transcendentalism were, all three, the tokens—and products too—of a great moral awakening. The foundations of social order seemed to be crumbling under the test of destructive criticism. The tablets of the old theology were ground to powder in Boston, and in New York the first of our workingmen's parties began its courageous attacks upon the laws of political economy. Saviors of society appeared here and there, impostors like Joseph Smith and Matthias, and apostles of humanity like Robert Owen. The socialistic seed sown in Europe by Saint-Simon, Cabet and Fourier took root upon our soil and finally produced a harvest of enthusiastic communities and phalanxes, harbingers of a new heaven and new earth wherein should dwell righteousness. These preliminary New Jerusalems usually forbade marriage, and then came Sylvester Graham, commanding to abstain also from meats and prophesying regeneration by the use of unbolted flour, oatmeal and beans. All this running to and fro increased an appetite for knowledge, and the men were already in existence who would re-organize the press to meet the new demands.

In the political world the crowd was newly emancipated from colonial and aristocratic traditions and laws, newly vocal with enthusiasm for a democratic hero, Old Hickory, and willing to pose before the rest of the world. A new conception of journalistic functions began to take shape. The newspaper must adapt itself to meet the crowd. It must become the representative of the multitude rather than a few. Even while the violence of partisanship did not abate, the former proportions of general news and of partisan propaganda were gradually reversed. In this evolution the journalist began to differentiate himself from the politician, and journalism began to emerge as a distinct profession.

It was natural that these changes should be most significant and interesting in the field of New York City journalism. Thanks to Martin Van Buren and Thurlow Weed, New York contained the best organized and most eager democracy in the Union. Thanks to the enterprise of its own business men, and subsequently to the policy of DeWitt Clinton, New York City had become the metropolis of the country, wherein the new journalism could find its best and largest audience.

The leading political papers in New York City in 1829 were the *Courier and Enquirer*, a Democratic sheet of the old-fashioned sort ; the *Journal of Commerce*, which may be described as " Adams Anti-Slavery ;" and the *Evening Post*, Jacksonian. The commer-



cial and advertisement bulletins, like the *Gazette* or the *Commercial Advertiser*, could count perhaps a larger circulation, which scarcely reached in either case a daily issue of two thousand copies; but these papers never aspired to represent public sentiment. For that honor, there was brisk competition between the *Courier and Enquirer* and the *Journal of Commerce*, both sixpenny morning papers, and both catering to the political tastes of the mercantile classes.

The *Evening Post* rested on a narrower basis. It was, as it has always been, the favorite of the small cultivated class, and it had already been immortalized by the famous "Croaker" literature of Fitz Greene Halleck and Joseph Rodman Drake. The paper passed in 1829 from the hands of the dying Coleman into the control of William Leggett and William Cullen Bryant. These two editors, both young and ardent, and both poets, were happily described in the columns of the *Courier and Enquirer* as "the chanting cherubs of the *Post*," a title which clung to them for years.

Under Mr. Bryant, who became the responsible editor in 1836, the *Post* naturally perfected that literary flavor which it had acquired from the doctrinaire Coleman and the brilliant Leggett. Mr. Bryant was neither a great journalist nor a politician. The force of the *Post* as a newspaper was small, and its political influence was necessarily limited. Mr. Bryant's best service to journalism was his consistent exposition of the ideals of a scholarly and cultivated gentleman; but his professional brethren and rivals were often angered by his didactic tone, and made unkind allusions to the phylacteries of the Pharisees.

Mr. Bryant's catholic moderation of judgment lent to his political opinions a noteworthy consistency in conservatism. To Van Buren democracy the *Evening Post* was attached without variable-ness or shadow of turning. Satisfied with the general principles of that party concerning free-trade, slavery and hard-money, Bryant and the *Post* blindly followed all the Van Burenite twistings throughout the Free Soil period, and finally fell with the rest of the anti-slavery democrats into the yet inchoate mass of the Republican party. Throughout the whole era of the war, it represented the sentiment of that democratic element in the new party. Since the war it has returned with that same clientage to its old political affinities, a most remarkable instance of permanence in the political relations of a metropolitan newspaper.

The *Courier and Enquirer*, in 1829, was the property of James Watson Webb, a wealthy, hot-headed young aristocrat, who would have been more congenially placed among the fire-eaters of the Palmetto State than in democratic New York. The possession

of pecuniary resources enabled Webb to command efficient service and thus the *Courier* acquired a dignity and importance to which the mercurial, impulsive temperament of the proprietor and senior editor was always the principal drawback. Col. Webb's West Point education did not tend to curb his ebullient spirits or to diminish his punctilious sensitiveness concerning his honor. The sword, the pistol, the walking-cane and the fist were all handier if not mightier weapons than the pen to him. Several times he assaulted the proprietor of the *Herald* in the street. More than once he journeyed post-haste to Washington to pull the nose or let the blood of some magnate who had breathed too carelessly upon the name of Webb. Only the interposition of Governor Seward's pardon in 1842 saved Webb from serving two years in the state's prison for fighting a duel on a Sunday with Hon. Thomas F. Marshall of Kentucky. The elaborate bombast and grandiloquence with which Webb described these encounters are among the most amusing reminiscences of New York journalism.<sup>1</sup>

If Col. Webb's excitable energy could have been legitimately and sensibly directed in the field of his ostensible profession, he might have founded a great newspaper. Even as it was, a very considerable stimulus in newspaper enterprise was derived from him. The *Courier and Enquirer* entered into lively competition with the *Journal of Commerce* for the first possession of news from Europe. From 1830 to 1834 these papers kept fast-sailing schooners and clipper ships off Sandy Hook to intercept incoming steamers and to carry up the harbor if possible some "exclusive" news. The *Courier* and the *Journal of Commerce* during the years named spent from \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year on their news-schooners. Their rivalries occasionally contributed to the gayety of the town. Once when the clipper *Ajax* was about due from Europe, the *Courier* printed a postscript to the effect that the *Ajax* had come and brought news, a summary of which followed. A few copies were printed with this postscript and left at doors near the office of the *Journal of Commerce*. Watchers saw when one was "borrowed" and the others were taken up and destroyed. The *Courier's* regular edition was then printed without the postscript. The *Journal*,

<sup>1</sup> Witness the laborious elegance of his account of the famous assault upon Duff Green, editor of the *Washington Telegraph*: "After looking at him in silence for some seconds, I placed under my arm the walking-cane which I used, and leaned against the south jamb of the door, addressing him in the following terms which are still fresh in my recollection: 'You poor contemptible, cowardly puppy, do you not feel that you are a coward and that every drop of blood that courses through your veins is of the same kind of hue as your complexion? Contemptible and degraded as you are,' etc., etc., *ad libitum*."

however, was filled with "News by the *Ajax*." Everybody said, "The *Journal* is ahead of the *Courier* again," until the truth came out that the *Ajax* had not arrived, and then everybody laughed at the *Journal*. From 1833 to 1835 the two papers, under the initiative of Hale and Hallock, proprietors of the *Journal of Commerce*, organized daily pony expresses from Washington, but that experiment was too enterprising to endure.

The vitality of these papers was all expended in these spasmodic attempts to collect news and in a more serious effort to surpass each other in the size of their blanket sheets. They measured success by the square foot of white paper in a page, and this ludicrous contest absorbed their energies for years. The *Courier and Enquirer* plumed itself in 1850 on being 68 square inches larger than the London *Times* and on containing more than twice as many ems of printed matter. In March, 1853, the *Journal of Commerce* beat this record and measured  $14\frac{1}{3}$  square feet to the sheet, which meant that each page of the journal contained  $76\frac{1}{8}$  square inches more than a page of the *Courier*.

The tone of these journals was very stately, except when referring to each other. The political articles were long and labored, the references to current events were meagre and veiled in ample rhetoric. The same dignity characterized the business management. Papers were sold only over the counter or by the regular carriers. In those days, if Col. Webb had heard a ragged urchin bawling the name of the *Courier and Enquirer* in the streets, he would have cuffed the lad soundly for his presumption, and wondered what Machiavellian ingenuity had contrived this insult also. Annual subscriptions were universally accepted on a credit system and advertisements were inserted for a long time in advance on the same plan of payment. "The result was that so late as 1850, when New York City had a population of half a million, a sixpenny blanket sheet like the *Journal of Commerce* had a daily circulation of 4500, and Hallock thought that a yearly increase of 500 in that circulation was something to boast of."

James Watson Webb merited the laurels of Fame for the same reason that gave Louis XIV. the title of "Great," because of the eminent men whom he gathered around him. The *Courier and Enquirer* became the foster-mother of nearly all the bright young journalists of that generation, with the exception of Horace Greeley. Among these knights of the quill were Charles King, afterwards President of Columbia College, James K. Paulding, the novelist, afterwards Secretary of War, and Henry J. Raymond, the founder of the New York *Times*. But the most remarkable members of

Webb's group of lieutenants and associates were two men who entered his office in 1829 as part of the fixtures of the New York *Enquirer*. These were Mordecai Manasseh Noah and James Gordon Bennett. Major Noah's personality is more interesting to the psychologist than important to the historian. He was an Israelite, indeed, in whom there was much guile. Since 1816 he had been editor of the city organ of Tammany Hall, and an aspirant for various political offices, some of which he obtained. When he was a candidate for the shrievalty of New York City it was objected that a Jew ought not to be permitted to hang a Christian. "Pretty Christians," said Noah, "to require hanging at all!" Noah was a brilliant paragraphist, but too erratic and uneasy to make a durable impression in any calling. His vagaries touched occasionally on the verge of insanity, as when he attempted to gather all the lost tribes of Israel, among whom the Red Indians were to be included, into a new city on Grand Island in the Niagara River. Clad in a rich antique costume, he dedicated in September 1825, the corner-stone of the new Hebrew capital, and named the place "Ararat," in honor of his illustrious ancestor, the elder Noah.

The three men Webb, Noah, and Bennett, who were so closely associated in the conduct of the *Courier and Enquirer* in 1830, had not a few points in common. There was a dash of charlatanry in all three. They were alive to the mercantile value of sensationalism. They were all restless spirits, anxious to magnify their office, and all were half-conscious of an enormous waste of latent force somewhere in the operation of the newspaper institution. More than one enthusiast in the renaissance of 1830 had already perceived the power that the press could exert, if it could arrest the attention of a larger circle of readers. To achieve this, the paper must contain news that everyone would wish to read, and must be cheap enough for everyone to buy.

A suggestion of the possibilities in this direction was already offered by the *Illustrated Penny Magazine*, which was issued in London in 1830, and was sold in large quantities in New York and other cities. Journalism for the millions was felt to be in the air, although the *Illustrated Penny Magazine* was in no sense a newspaper. The *Bostonian* in Boston and the *Cent* in Philadelphia were feeble and short-lived attempts to put the product of the printing-press within the reach of all. The first penny paper of any considerable pretension was the *Morning Post* which began publication in New York City, January 1, 1833. Dr. H. D. Shepard, Horace Greeley, and Francis V. Story ventured to start the enterprise upon a capital of \$200 and a combined credit scarcely equal to the pur-

chase of \$40 worth of type. The paper was at first sold for two cents, but after the first week, the price was lowered to one cent. At that price the paper lived for just two weeks more. It would not deserve this mention but for its influence upon Greeley's subsequent success.

Out of all the various attempts to make a cheap newspaper that could live, only three succeeded, each after its kind, the *Sun*, the *Herald*, and the *Tribune*. The *Sun* was the pioneer. It was first issued, September 3, 1833, by Benjamin H. Day, an intelligent workingman, and a job printer by occupation. There had been several similar experiments during the preceding year, but they had all come to a speedy and untimely end. The *Sun* was the first penny newspaper that endured and it remained a penny sheet until 1861. It started with a circulation of 300. Its first issue contained twelve columns of matter, each column ten inches long. It was at the outset chiefly an advertising medium, and had no political influence. It scarcely made room at that time for financial or market items, or even editorial notes. It was filled with bits of local news and with advertisements for "Help Wanted," but this made it popular with the masses in search of employment. The first large increase of the visible radiance of the *Sun* was derived from the lively imagination of its editor, Richard Adams Locke.

One day in 1835, Mr. Locke, who had formerly been a reporter for the *Courier and Enquirer*, made some discoveries about the moon, wrote out the details, attributed the article to a "Supplement of the *Edinburgh Philosophical Journal*," and published the story as "filling" in the columns of the *Sun*. The article purported to describe discoveries made by Sir John Herschel at the Cape of Good Hope, and related by him to the *Edinburgh Journal*. Sir John was then at the Cape and had set up a new telescope there. The story ran that his telescope had revealed everything on the surface of the moon, and had discovered inhabitants, houses, soil, crops, animals, and modes of living. Everyone believed it at first, and everyone bought the *Sun* to read about it. The large papers were sadly deceived. The *New York Daily Advertiser* said "Sir John has added a stock of knowledge to the present age that will immortalize his name, and place it high on the page of science." Other papers claimed to have received the news as soon as the *Sun* did, but asserted that it had until now been crowded out by pressure of reading matter. The *Albany Advertiser* stated that it had read in an *Edinburgh scientific journal* an account of discoveries by Sir John Herschel, discoveries that filled the editor, so he said, with "unspeakable emotions of pleasure and astonishment." The *New York*

*Herald* finally exposed the hoax, but the reputation of the *Sun* was made, and Mr. Day introduced steam power into his printing-office in order to keep up with the demand. The *Sun* was the pioneer in this mechanical improvement, as well as in the publication of such gigantic "fakes."

Shortly afterward the *Sun* passed into the hands of the Beach family, who retained its management for thirty years, 1837-1868. The *Sun* in those early days did not aspire to be an intellectual force in the community. It never quite escaped from the predominant character of a "want" newspaper, but the results of its pecuniary success were far-reaching. Here was a paper which wore no party uniform, scarcely seemed to entertain any political preferences, was subsidized by no party managers, and yet in two years it had acquired a larger circulation than any of its contemptuous comrades could show. It reached the working-people as they never did, and within ten years it had prospered enough to command the best facilities for the transmission of news from distant points. It was still more of an advertiser than a newspaper, and it lacked the weight of any strong individuality, but it had answered its problem.

Quite different, much more efficient, but equally independent solutions were shortly afterwards offered by two observant journalists, James Gordon Bennett and Horace Greeley. James Gordon Bennett was completely described in Parton's clever phrase, as a "man with a French intellect and Scotch habits." He was a native of Scotland, and was born and educated amid Catholic surroundings, but even in youth the bonds of that faith rested very lightly upon him. He declared that the perusal of Franklin's autobiography sent him to America. In 1819, being about twenty years old, he landed at Halifax and gradually worked his way down the coast as far as Charleston, S. C. He picked up any job that came in his way, from school-teaching to reporting, but after 1823 he was steadily engaged in newspaper work in New York. His life in the South had inspired him with contempt for the negro slave and with admiration for the planter aristocracy, so that he naturally enlisted in the ranks of the conservative democracy. As reporter for the New York *Enquirer* in 1827 he wrote from Washington a series of gossipy letters about public men and affairs at the national capital. These letters were avowedly modelled by him upon the letters of Horace Walpole and were the first professional efforts of the kind. They were written in the interest of Andrew Jackson, and of the Regency in New York, and they were then deemed graphic and amusing pictures of Washington life. Amusing they

certainly were, for after witnessing Jackson's inauguration, Bennett wrote that "Justice, with firmer grasp, secured her scales, 'Hope, enchanted, smiled,' and the Genius of our country breathed a living defiance to the world." "What a lesson," concluded Bennett, "for the monarchies of Europe!" Republican sentiments were still glittering with the charm of novelty to this young Scotchman, and his exuberance of imagination was not simulated. It was quite native and spontaneous. The process of disillusion followed speedily and was too rapid and extended for his moral health. He became a member of the Tammany Society and he became intimately associated with Webb and Noah. Nevertheless, so steadfast was he to the name and doctrine of democracy that he cut loose from Webb and Noah when they, in 1832, under strong suspicion of venality, abruptly abjured the Jackson faith.

The *Courier and Enquirer* became the leading organ of the party which Col. Webb first called "Whig," and Bennett was thrown out of employment. Bennett expected aid from the Regency for whom he had sacrificed himself. He seems to have had no further aim as yet than to become a political journalist like his neighbors and associates, and to await the rewards of partisan service. He made two shortlived attempts to establish a party organ, and in its behalf he wrote appealing letters to Hoyt and to Van Buren asking for loans of money. Van Buren, who was just then complaining to Hoyt that his newspaper chorus was too expensive, buttoned his pocket against James Gordon Bennett, and the other Regency politicians refused to help. These keen-witted men had discerned Bennett's volatile character. He was too elusive for them. He had even made fun of Croswell and he had not been obsequious enough regarding the Democratic policy concerning the deposits. So they passed him by on the other side, and thereby assisted to revolutionize our newspaper world.

Bennett had discovered that a paper which is universally denounced will be universally read. He had perceived that a democratic revival demanded a more democratic press, and his tough Scotch fibre was elastic enough to endure either pull or pressure. Stung by what he termed Van Buren's heartlessness, he determined to make a paper which should be the master of politicians, not their tool. To that purpose, despite all his frivolities and sinuosities, he clung with the tenacity of a Scotchman and the effrontery of a Frenchman. Moreover Bennett possessed in a high degree the ability which is at once the pride and bane of two-thirds of our so-called successful journalists to-day—the ability to write crisply, interestingly, and omnisciently about everything, including the things of which he knew nothing.

Out of the cellar at No. 20 Wall Street came the first copy of the *Daily Herald*, May 6, 1835, a little four-page penny paper, with four columns to a page. At the outset Bennett went straight to his mark. In the first place, his salutatory spoke of "principles, political party principles" as "steel-traps to catch the public." "We mean," wrote Bennett, "to be perfectly understood on this point, and openly disclaim all steel-traps, all principle as it is called, all party, all politics." A little later he made a plainer statement of his real political principles: "We have never been in a minority, and we never shall be." In other words his paper had become his party, and its pecuniary success his creed. To insure the triumph of that creed it was necessary that the *Herald* should voice the dominant sentiment of the day. Instead of preaching the gospel of one party in adversity and in success alike, as party organs did and do, the *Herald* must tread in the newest footmarks of shifting majorities. It might expostulate or satirize judiciously, but it must please. Thus the *Herald* was ordinarily a powerful expositor of Hunker democracy and it enjoyed a large circulation and influence in the South, yet in the two presidential campaigns in which the Whigs were successful the *Herald* kept in the van of the shouting multitude, first for "Tippecanoe and Tyler too," and afterwards for "Old Rough and Ready" Taylor.

Such was the first effect of triumphant democracy upon the press, as estimated by the most far-sighted journalist of that era. In the second place, the cheap papers, the *Sun* and the *Herald*, rejected the cumbrous credit system altogether. This cash system was tantamount to an emancipation from creditors, subscribers, and advertisers. The old cry of "Stop my paper" lost much of its terror.

In the third place, Bennett literally fulfilled his editorial promise to "give a picture of the world." He, first, in 1835, went on 'Change, note-book in hand, and wrote daily descriptions and reports of the stock markets. He first seized upon the opening of steam communication with Europe to organize upon that continent a bureau of foreign correspondence. He first in 1838 adopted the practice of reporting in full the proceedings of courts of law when cases of public interest were on the docket. In the same year he first began to publish in full the speeches of prominent public men in Congress and out of it. He vied with the elder papers in the race to meet the incoming ships from Europe, but when Bennett stationed his boats off Montauk Point and ran special locomotives over the Long Island Railway or even from Boston, his dignified contemporaries retired. He first in 1839 reported the proceedings of the religious



societies at their annual meetings. The good men and women at first regarded the reporter as a veritable serpent in the garden and sought to expel and exclude him, but they soon became reconciled to his presence.

In the fourth place, Bennett's editorial comments were always in the shape of short paragraphs filled with a strange but very readable mixture of common sense and impudence. In one of the first numbers he said: "The New York and Erie Railroad is to break ground in a few days. We hope they will break nothing else." This sarcasm was prophetic enough to make a reputation for any oracle. Again, the Presbyterian denomination was covered with the dust of a ponderous doctrinal controversy between Old School and New School. Bennett put the whole altercation under his microscope with a quiet remark which scarcely concealed the size of his chuckle: "Great trouble among the Presbyterians just now. The question in dispute is whether or not a man can do anything towards saving his own soul." At another time he referred to "the holy Roman Catholic Church," adding in a parenthesis "all of us Catholics are devilish holy." In 1840 when Bishop Hughes and Governor Seward tried to get public money for Catholic schools and thereby caused the formation of the Native American party, Bennett and the *Herald* were violent opponents of the Bishop's schemes, and Bennett said that his Reverence was trying to organize his church into a political club. The public had no appetite for the long-winded essays by "Publius" and "Honestus" and "Veritas" in the stately blanket sheets, when it could feed on such crisp criticism as this.

In the fifth place, Mr. Bennett's newspaper was quite emancipated also from the accepted standards of conventionality, one might almost say of ethics. He knew better than any of his rivals the pecuniary value of wholesale advertisement and his cold-blooded manner of translating notoriety into dollars and cents shocked the chivalrous soul of James Watson Webb. According to Webb's catechism gentlemen whose statements were too sharply criticized or whose motives were impugned could discover a healing balm only in an invitation to shed blood. Bennett laughed at such conduct and laughed also at such provocations. Every attack upon him was duly chronicled in the *Herald* and made a fresh means for exalting the horn of the newspaper and for extending its circulation. Bennett was assaulted on the street and in his office by those whom he censured and lampooned. Infernal machines were sent to blow him into atoms. Bennett answered with blows of ridicule and the public laughed with him and swelled the revenues of the *Herald*

still more. Demos would buy and read the paper if it amused him, and so Bennett played the fool as well as the omniscient vizier to his majesty, the public.

The audacious vanity and vulgarity with which he paraded his own private affairs before his readers kept the light-minded portion of the community in a guffaw and alert to know what Bennett would do next. At one time he discourses thus: "Amid all these thronging ideas hurrying across the mind, crowds of feelings fresh from the heart, and projects of the fancy stealing on the heels of each other as if by enchantment, there is one drawback, there is one sin, there is one piece of wickedness of which I am guilty, and with which my conscience is weighed down night and day; I am a bachelor." Some time later he announced his engagement in a leading article under these headlines in flaming type: "To the readers of the *Herald*—Declaration of Love—Caught at last—Going to be married—New Movement in Civilization." The first and last stanzas of the wild rhapsody that follows are these: "I am going to be married in a few days. The weather is so beautiful, times are getting so good; the prospects of political and moral reform so auspicious that I cannot resist the divine instinct of honest nature any longer. . . . I cannot stop in my career. I must fulfill that awful destiny which the Almighty Father has written against my name in the broad letters of life against the wall of heaven. . . . My ardent desire has been through life, to reach the highest order of human excellence by the shortest possible cut. Association, night and day, in sickness and in health, in war and in peace, with a woman of this highest order of excellence must produce some curious results in my heart and feelings, and these results the future will develop in due time in the columns of the *Herald*. Meantime I return my heartfelt thanks for the enthusiastic patronage of the public, both of Europe and of America. The holy estate of wedlock will only increase my desire to be still more useful. God Almighty bless you all. James Gordon Bennett."

The freedom with which the *Herald* related the annals of police courts and the particularity with which it recited scandals caused the greatest offense. The elder generation regarded Bennett as one who feared not God nor regarded man. Clergymen denounced him from the pulpit. Good men shook their heads over the prosperity of the *Herald* as an ominous sign of the times, and then read it to see what new iniquity it had been guilty of. "We can well remember," says Parton, "when people bought the *Herald* on the sly and blushed when they were caught reading it; and when the man in a country place who openly subscribed for it intended by that act dis-

tinctly to enroll himself among the ungodly." Four classes in the community denounced the *Herald*: the managers of the old papers and the politicians, for obvious reasons; the stockbrokers because of the financial articles in the *Herald*; and the clergy, because of Bennett's sensationalism and open rejection of sectarian restrictions. "We defy," wrote Bennett, "the bigots of Catholicity or of Protestantism. Like Luther, like Paul, we go on our own hook." Relying on the sentiment of these four classes, the ponderous battery of the sixpenny papers, headed by the *Courier and Enquirer*, the *Journal of Commerce* and the *Evening Post* began "the moral war" against the *Herald*. They undertook to create a public sentiment against Bennett which would kill his paper. They boycotted it, and used the utmost personal and corporate influence to banish the paper from hotels and reading-rooms and to frighten away its advertisers. Webb, for instance, wrote of the "moral leprosy and revolting blasphemy of the vile sheet of that unprincipled adventurer and vulgar, depraved wretch." Mr. Park Benjamin, who was then editing a little evening paper, the *Signal*, now quite forgotten, surpassed Webb and Noah together in the abundance of his picturesque objurgation. He managed to call Bennett an "obscene foreign vagabond, a pestilential scoundrel, ass, rogue, habitual liar, loathsome and leprous slanderer and libeller." The principal support that this "moral crusade" received in the community came from the politicians of the Van Buren machine, who were eager to punish Bennett for his bitter opposition to Van Buren's re-election. The Van Buren newspapers were the most malevolent in the use of scurrilous personalities, and one of their favorite titles, "Cross-eyed vagabond," elicited from Bennett a resort in the manner of his happiest impudence. "It is true," he wrote, "that I am thus handicapped, but my visual obliquity was caused by my earnest endeavors to watch the winding ways of Martin Van Buren."

The only really sufficient pretext for this holy war was the depraved avidity with which Bennett had seized upon bits of scandal and hurried them into print in order to attract readers, even at the risk of debauching them. But even in this wickedness the *Herald* had not been a sinner above most of the other Galilaeans, unless it were worse to peddle scandal at two cents a bucket than to sell it for six cents. But not even Bennett needed to point out the ludicrousness of men like Webb and Noah in the garb of moral censors and guardians of virtue. There was a revulsion of sentiment in favor of the paper which seemed to have no friends.

Three well-known politicians and merchants called one morning upon Mr. E. K. Collins, afterwards the owner of the famous Collins

line of steamers, and, adverting to the bad character of the *Herald*, began to allude to Mr. Collins's advertisements in that paper. "Yes, yes," replied Mr. Collins, in his quick, decided tone, "yes, yes, I understand. Charles," calling to a clerk in another room, "how many advertisements have we in the *Herald* this morning?" "Three, sir," answered the polite Charles. "Three, yes, yes. Well, Charles, put in three more to-morrow morning." Then, turning to the committee, he said: "That is my answer, gentlemen, good morning."

Amid all the clamor Bennett as usual kept his temper, and replied only with jocose sallies. He generally referred to his opponents as "The Holy Alliance," and gravely thanked them for giving him so much valuable advertisement. He was obliged to enlarge the *Herald*, and its circulation considerably exceeded that of all his enemies combined. The complete pecuniary success of both the *Herald* and the *Sun* proved to be an impregnable defense. The Holy Alliance gradually disbanded and a host of imitators of both the *Sun* and the *Herald* sprang up in New York and in other cities. Most of them met an early death, but a few repeated the history of their models, as the *Herald* in Boston, the *Ledger* and the *Sun* in Philadelphia, and the *Sun* in Baltimore. In connection with the *Ledger* and the *Baltimore Sun*, the *New York Herald* established the famous pony express from Mobile to Montgomery during the Mexican War, by which all the details of that war appeared in those journals before they were received by the authorities at Washington. This exploit destroyed all that was left of the Holy Alliance, and its principal members were glad to join in 1849 to 1851 with the *Herald* in the combination for newsgetting which is now known as the New York Associated Press. That was Bennett's triumph. The institution of the Press submitted then and there to the rule of Publicity and in her service acquired that irresponsible power which we can now neither restrain nor endure.

The old fashioned party-organs accommodated themselves to the new gospel with varying fidelity and with varying success. The *Courier and Enquirer* lingered along in a semi-comatose state until 1861, when it was buried in that mausoleum of dead newspapers, the *New York World*. The *Journal of Commerce*, last of the blanket sheets, pursued the even tenor of its way among the counting-rooms, almost unnoticed by the large world, until its non-resistant ultra-Democratic doctrines in 1861 brought it some unprofitable notoriety. This was a strange fate for a paper which thirty years before, under the same proprietors, had been regarded as an Abolition sheet.

Independent journalism, as represented first by the *Sun* and *Herald*, had won a complete victory over old-fashioned partisan journalism. The time had forever departed when an Albany Regency could tune the press of the state as easily and simply as Queen Elizabeth used to tune the English pulpits. The partisan editor could no longer expect to rule as absolutely over the political opinions of his readers as the priest had once ruled over men's religious opinions. As James Parton phrased it, "An editorial is only a man speaking to men ; but the news is Providence speaking to men." For good or for ill, the victory of Bennett's *Herald* came to mean this exaltation of fact over opinion ; it meant the recognition of journalism as a profession, as a profession with an end and aim in itself alone, utterly separate from merely political or religious purposes. That victory of Bennett's *Herald* helped to introduce into the world an ideal of devotion to journalism, *i. e.*, to truth-telling for its own sake, to which neither Bennett nor his paper could ever lay serious claim.

Bennett was often little better than a mountebank ; his channel of truth discharged its contents without discrimination, sometimes clear water and sometimes the filth of a sewer. The stream cannot rise higher than its source ; and no newspaper can be better than its dominant mind. We may regret that the cultured Bryant did not assume the prerogative of holding the mirror up to nature, did not transform the *Evening Post* into a keyboard across whose surface ran all the wires of human thought and passion. But the stubborn fact remains that the unmoral Bennett had this capacity for successful enterprise and had shaken off every ambition but the journalistic one. The virtuous Bryant had neither the capacity for such enterprise nor the freedom from distracting bondage to two or even more masters.

CHARLES H. LEVERMORE.